# Group Magazine Interview



On September 19 of last year, Christian singer/song-writer Rich Mullins died after he was thrown from his jeep on an Illinois interstates.

Mullins, who broke into Christian music when Amy Grant recorded his song "Sing Your Praise to the Lord," released 12 albums over 11 years. He was known as a Christian iconoclast - a man who soared in popularity as songs such as "Awesome God" topped the Christian music charts, but who loped around bare-footed in comfortably tattered clothing and lived in a small self-built hogan on a Navajo Indian reservation.

A short time before his death, veteran youth leader and GROUP contributor Mike Nappa talked to Mullins, a former full-time youth worker himself, about why he shunned the life of a successful musician to spend his life teaching music to Navajo teenagers.

Not long before his death in a car accident last September, Christian artist Rich Mullins talked to GROUP about his ministry passion for teenagers and the one thing they need to know

GROUP: What fueled your decision to move to the reservation?

MULLINS: Several years ago I got to go to Asia for the summer. It was a great opportunity for me to see Christianity from a non-20th-century-American slant. That experience confirmed the truth of the essence of Christianity, and it challenged my opinions about peripheral issues.

GROUP: How did you get from Asia to a Navajo reservation?

MULLINS: When I got back to the United States, I continued to think about how slanted we all view the world. This isn't to say your slant isn't a good one, but it's only one slant. Many of the experiences I had there, with people who had a different slant, really deepened and broadened and enriched my view of what God was doing here. I went, "Wow! I want to do that again! Only I want to do it in more of a concentrated effort." Here in this country, we have some 200 cultures that are not white-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant-20th-century-evangelical-Christian. I came here [to the Navajo reservation] hoping to include in my vision the slant that these people have.

GROUP: What's been your most memorable moment since you moved to the reservation?

MULLINS: Probably one night down in Canyon de Chelly. I was there with some friends who had come down from Colorado Springs to visit. We were setting up camp on the rim of the canyon. This guy [a Navajo] came over and asked if we anted to come down for a cookout that evening. I was really thrilled because, unless you're a Navajo, you have to have a guide to go into the canyon. So we went, and the people who invited us down were Christians! It was kind of an amazing thing to be on the bottom of that canyon and be welcomed there. Just to sit in a little summer house, an open-air kind of thing, and hear them talking to one another in Navajo. Then this guy went out and played a flute in the bottom of the canyon. You could hear it echoing all around. It was really kind of an amazing thing.

GROUP: Speaking of amazing, your musical style seems geared for adults, yet teenagers make up a large portion of your fan base. Why do you suppose teenagers are drawn to your music?

MULLINS: I think kids today, like kids when I was growing up, want to find something. I think they're looking for the real thing.

GROUP: So you think kids are attracted by the reality your music reflects?

MULLINS: Yeah. The hilarious thing is, kids say, "You and Carman are my two favorite artists." And I go, "Wow! You've covered the span there!" I'm probably as far to the left of evangelical conservative Christianity as you can go. He's probably as far to the right as you can go without being a total loony! When you're young, you're attracted to people who are on the radical ends of the poles. When you're young, you naturally think that there are real answers and there are people who know these answers. As you get older, I think everyone gets a little more moderate about everything. Not that I don't believe there are real answers, I just think that even if we knew what they were, they wouldn't make sense to us.

GROUP: If you could give teenagers anything, what would it be?

MULLINS: Everyone gets burned. You can't go through life and not be burned. Some fires destroy us and some fires refine us. Say a guy and a girl are dating and they feel pressed to compromise their morals in the course of the date. The guy chooses to be faithful to Christ; he chooses to say, "Purity is important and I'm going to choose obedience to Christ over obedience to my instincts." His girlfriend may go, "Man, you're a wacko. Man, you're a pud." He may lose her, and that will hurt. That's going to burn. Bu that's the kind of fire that will purify him. When you compromise yourself, you're going still going to get burned because things don't generally work out all that great in life. You're still going to get burned, but at the end of that burning you'll have no integrity left, and you'll be destroyed

by that. So, I tell kids, "You're going to get burned. Always choose to be burned by that fire that refines - the fire of obedience rather than the fire of sin."

## Rich Mullins on...

**Kids Obeying Parents**- "Kids are fooling themselves if they think they can obey God and be disobedient to their parents. They're fooling themselves if they think they can love God and not love their parents."

**What Parents Can Give Kids**- "The best thing parents have to offer their kids is not more religious activity, but themselves. Yes, it's good if your kid says, 'I'd rather go to [a Christian] concert than Motley Crue,' but it would be better for that kid to spend the evening at home with his parents."

**Life's Realities-** "When you're raised in a rationalist society, you think everything is supposed to make sense. That's just not the way life is."

**Generosity**- "I think that generosity is what happens naturally if you love people. I think Christ was ridiculous in his generosity. Had he not been so foolishly generous, I would be hopelessly lost."

**Faith**- "I think people who are genuinely joyful are people who have an unshakable faith. They're people who live in the reality of the presence of the risen Christ."

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